

# Effects-Based Decisions and Actions

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**W**HY SHOULD commanders and staff use effects-based decision and action? Staffs often spend precious time in process rather than in product. They devote many hours working through all the steps in the decisionmaking process rather than focusing on issuing an order. Often, units waste time executing a plan that does not affect the enemy as the plan was designed to do, but units follow the plan anyway because it is “the plan.” An effects-based decision and action system that focuses on product, not process, and on effect on the enemy, not adherence to the plan, addresses these issues. In addition, an effects-based decision and action system leads to decisions and allows actions to be performed faster than an enemy can do the same, thereby increasing the probability that units can take advantage of opportunities as they arise on the battlefield. Finally, an effects-based decision and action system fits the operational concepts of the Army’s Objective Force.

Effects-based decisions and actions begin with commanders at every level, and they describe how commanders want to bring effects to bear on the enemy. “Effects” describes what commanders and units are trying to do to the enemy. Effects are the “end” or goal of the operation, battle, or activity a unit is undertaking. All else is “means”; that is, operations, battles, or other activities are the means through which a unit intends to achieve the effect the commander describes. Effects are fixed; means are variable.

Effects must be nested. A description of desired effects on the enemy begins with the senior commander and works its way down through an organization. Each subordinate commander must ensure that the effects described are consistent with those

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of the commander two levels above. Furthermore, effects must be described clearly and concisely enough to be useful two levels down.

Effects influence an enemy, by which we mean the conventional definition—uniformed soldiers of a nation-state or group of nation-states with which the United States is in armed conflict. The second, nontraditional definition is more difficult to define; it includes any person, place, group, action, or situation that inhibits an organization from accomplishing its mission.

An effects-based decision and action system changes the way in which units use commander’s intent, which current doctrine defines in terms of purpose, method/key tasks, and end state. Commander’s intent is a task-based, stand-alone component of the operations order. In contrast, an effects-based decision and action system integrates commander’s intent into other parts of the order; incorporates purpose into the mission; embeds key tasks as part of missions to subordinate units; and



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integrates the end state into the concept of the operation (see figure).

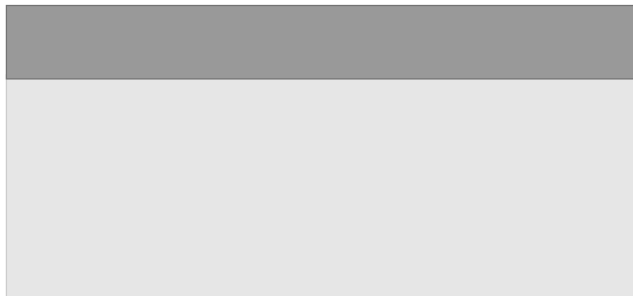
The difference between current doctrinal commander’s intent and an effects-based decision and action system is critical. In an effects-based decision and action system, the *mission* and the *concept of the operation* become the means (the variable element) the commander envisions to implement the action he wants to inflict on the enemy, that is, the end that he describes in the intent (the fixed element). The *why* of the mission statement states why, from a friendly commander’s perspective, he assigns a particular task. Examples of mission statements that current doctrine generates are “seize a hill to protect a flank”; “secure a bridge to facilitate a river crossing”; “defend a town to protect a key facility.”

Effects, on the other hand, are writ-

ten from the enemy’s perspective. A commander’s intent that an effects-based decision and action system generates might state, “prevent the enemy from interrupting friendly movement across the river”; “keep the enemy within a specific geographic area”; “destroy the enemy’s ability to perform a particular task.”

Intent—the effect a commander wants to have on the enemy—governs initiative. In fact, intent should govern all activity on the battlefield and on staffs at every level. Doing things that will not have the commander’s desired effect on the enemy is wasted effort. Worse, such efforts are counter-

productive and impede achieving the organization’s goal. An organization achieves real economy of effort when all of its parts contribute to a common goal. Wasted effort occurs when part of



the organization is busy with activities that are only tangentially related to the common goal.

The nature of any battlefield is such that opportunities arise quickly and fade just as quickly. How can a subordinate commander take advantage of such opportunities? Most of the time, if a subordinate commander reports, seeks guidance, and only then acts, an opportunity can slip away. Task-based intent is of little help, for when an unforeseen opportunity arises and a commander refers to task-based intent to consider how best to take advantage of that opportunity, the guidance that the task-based intent implies is "do these tasks," that is, follow the plan.

Effects-based intent provides the subordinate commander with an explicit decision tool to use when presented with fleeting opportunities. If taking advantage of an opportunity produces or helps produce the effect the senior commander desires, the subordinate commander should take it. The subordinate commander should inform adjacent commanders of what action he is going to take, inform higher commanders of his intent, then act so as not to miss the opportunity.

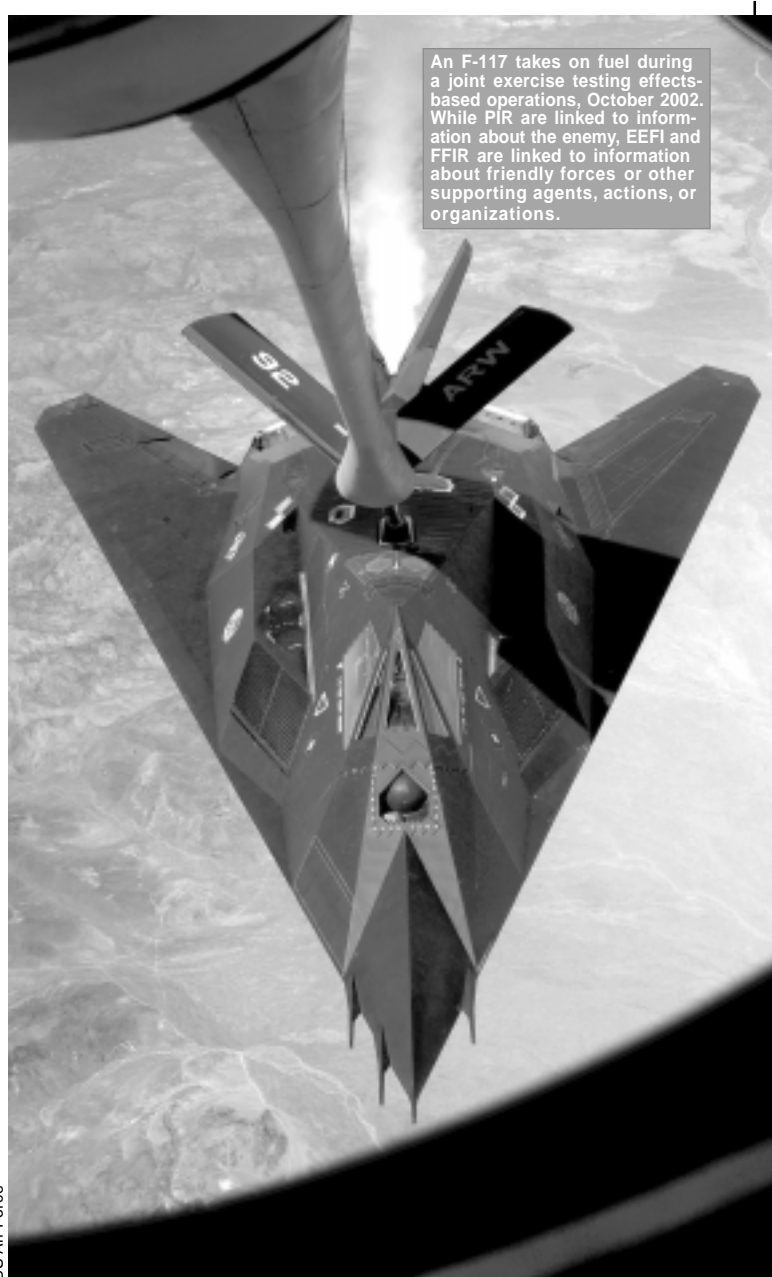
Intent, then, is sacrosanct, for it describes the desired end state. Mission and concept of the operation vary, for they describe means. Altering a mission or adjusting a concept of the operation to achieve intent is well-used initiative. Of course, subordinate commanders must use judgment as well as initiative. Each level of command is nested within others. Any action a commander takes at one level will affect other levels. So, a commander who alters the mission or adjusts a concept of the operation must first think through how doing so will affect those around and above him as well as how his actions will help achieve the senior commander's intent.

Pursuing a fleeting opportunity creates new and more opportunities. Pursuing an opportunity in such a way so as to negatively affect one's parent organization or adjacent units does not create more opportunities. Rather, it could ruin the entire operation. Using judgment is why commanders get paid the big bucks.

## Decision Templates and Information Gathering

The current, doctrinal decision support template plays an important role in the effects-based decision and action system. Each decision on the template has several components:

- What is the decision?
- What are the minimal criteria?



An F-117 takes on fuel during a joint exercise testing effects-based operations, October 2002. While PIR are linked to information about the enemy, EEFI and FFIR are linked to information about friendly forces or other supporting agents, actions, or organizations.

*CCIR are composed of three elements: priority information requirements (PIR), essential elements of friendly information (EEFI), and friendly force information requirements (FFIR). . . . All or parts of CCIR are directly tied to criteria on the decision support template. The speed with which an organization receives a report, recognizes its relation to a pending decision, and forwards it to the correct person determines the speed with which that organization can make decisions and take action.*

- Who is authorized to make the decision?
- When must the decision be made to achieve the desired end state?

There are two important points about decision criteria to remember. First, decision criteria must be the

minimal set. Battlefield realities dictate that commanders will always make decisions under conditions of uncertainty and ambiguity. Therefore, to describe a set of decision criteria that requires full knowledge—100 percent certainty—is to ensure that the commander will never make a decision. Second, to know when a particular set of decision criteria is met means that the staff must require specific information about the enemy; friendly troops; or other agents, actions, or organizations. That set of information becomes all or part of the commander's critical information requirements (CCIR), the collection plan, and the reconnaissance plan.

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information about the enemy. EEFI and FFIR are linked to information about friendly forces or other supporting agents, actions, or organizations. Both kinds of information are important in decisionmaking.

PIR, EEFI, and FFIR arrive at headquarters in the form of reports (voice, digital, face-to-face). All or parts of CCIR are directly tied to criteria on the decision support template. The speed with which an organization receives a report, recognizes its relation to a pending decision, and forwards it to the correct person determines the speed with which that organization can make decisions and take action. Speed (and accuracy) of information flow relate directly to the speed of decisionmaking and action.

Information flow has several important components. First, it has a technical component made up of a digital network, a voice network, connecting nodes, network management tools, and so forth. Second, it has a human component of soldiers and lead-

ers who understand what information is important; who can recognize important information; and who knows how, when, and where to send it. Third, it has an organizational component made up of a set of standing operating procedures that a unit has, knows, and follows and a culture of aggressive action, not mere reporting, that focuses on achieving the commander's intent. For information to flow and be useful, all three components must be present.

## **Collection Planning**

An effects-based decision and action system continues the common understanding of collection planning as it applies to PIR, the collection plan, and the intelligence battlefield operating system (BOS). Here, the leaders of the intelligence BOS ensure that all collection means focus on answering the commander's PIR and are positioned to react as PIR change. These PIR are directly related to either the effects the commander wants to have on the enemy or on criteria needed to make a decision as described on the decision support template.

Collection planning is equally important in almost every other BOS, even though doctrine does not currently discuss it this way. For example, bits of EEFI or FFIR might be key relative to one or more decisions on the decision support template. The bits of information that satisfy EEFI or FFIR might come from a report generated somewhere within the friendly unit or from an organization supporting it. Identifying information needed, then assigning someone the task of collecting and reporting it, is a de facto cross-BOS collection plan—and a critical one at that.

An effects-based decision and action system puts together a new form of intent, a new description of CCIR, and a cross-BOS collection plan. Incorporating an effects-based decisionmaking and action system into doctrine has implications. Effects-based systems will alter some of the leader development training, professional military education, and training and fighting doctrine. These changes, however, will result in a more agile army—something we all want to achieve. More important, decisions and actions based on effects fit current battlefield realities and accords with Objective Force operational concepts. Therefore, the Army should consider incorporating effects-based decisions and actions systems into its doctrine. **MR**

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